

# CHALLENGES & SUCCESSSES 2004



Elko Field Office

3900 East Idaho Street

Elko, Nevada 89801

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# CHALLENGES & SUCCESSES



- ▶ *West Wendover City officials and BLM fire managers stand in front of a BLM fire engine that was turned over to the West Wendover Fire Department. Assisting rural areas is a major goal of the National Fire Plan in Nevada. As part of the Plan, BLM has transferred several engines to enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire districts. Congress set aside additional funding for this purpose in the fiscal year 2001-2003 budgets for federal wildland firefighting agencies.*
- ▶ *In Elko and Eureka Counties, engines have been given to the City of Jackpot, City of West Wendover, Goshute Fire Department, 10 Mile Volunteer Fire Department, Tecoma Volunteer Fire Department, and Eureka Volunteer Fire Department.*
- ▶ *In addition grants totaling \$200,000 + were given to rural fire departments in the Elko Field Office area.*

It is with pleasure that I send you this annual report about the activities of the Elko Field Office. We have put it together as a photo gallery of accomplishments in recent years. I think it is important, particularly with our pace of life these days, to take stock and reflect on work accomplished and work to be done.

Public land management in Nevada is neither simple nor easy. Conflicts between users, impacts to resources, concern for ecologically fragile systems, and important cultural resources must all be considered in the mix. The overall goal for all of us is quality habitat for animals, plants, and humans now and in future generations.

Now, more than ever, public lands are critical in the American West. They are valuable for a broad range of commercial endeavors — livestock grazing, mining, timber harvest, power generation and transmission, as well as for enhancement and protection of habitat for key plant and animal species, some of which are listed under the Endangered Species Act. Outdoor recreation enthusiasts are coming in increasing numbers with more and more motorized use on and off roads. Public lands are also important for ceremonial and religious practices for American Indians. The challenge for the BLM is to meet as many of these demands, and sometimes conflicting uses, as possible while providing protection for the resources and sustainability of the landscape over time.

I am very proud of the BLM employees in the Elko Field Office. It is a privilege for me to work with such talented and capable staff. We are involved in public land management because we believe in the public lands. We are a part of rural Nevada because we choose to be here. I am equally proud of our relationships with local officials, the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group, other partnerships and the public in Eureka, Lander, and Elko counties, as well as across Nevada. In today's world public land management is most successful when there is a high degree of public involvement and participation. We cannot and should not manage public lands without public input.

I look forward to our continued efforts together.

Sincerely,

*Helen Hankins*

Elko Field Manager



# FIRE PROTECTION & FUELS TREATMENTS

The general fuel types in the Elko area include several thousand acres of mixed conifer, substantially more pinyon/juniper woodland, mountain brush communities, sagebrush/perennial grass steppe, and areas of invasive and/or noxious weeds. There have been substantial changes in the ecology of this portion of the Great Basin over the last 100 years. Broad expanses of cheat grass, infestations of noxious weeds and pinyon-juniper encroachment into stands of sagebrush exist today but were not present during most of the last century.

Drought conditions over the last three years have exacerbated concerns. As a consequence of these and other factors, there is increased concern among the scientific community about fuel loading and the potential catastrophic consequences of large fires.

One purpose of these fuels treatment projects is to protect homes and private property from wildland fires. Creating green strips is one technique to protect large areas. Green strips are swaths of land planted with fire-resistant vegetation to slow or stop the spread of wildland fires. Green strips also provide a defensible space around communities at risk from wildland fires.

Since 2001, the Elko Field Office has treated thousands of acres of sage brush and created literally miles of fuel breaks and green strips to protect communities and rural development areas from wildfire. Eventually, a green strip will go from Elko to Osino north of I-80. In 2004, 15 miles of fuel break was constructed in Spring Creek.



**Above:** Aerial seeding is very efficient for distributing seed across a large area.



**Left:** A Bull Hog makes short work of thinning out thick stands of vegetation.



*In addition to fire protection, drill seeding perennial forbs and grasses improves wildlife habitat diversity and benefits livestock.*



*Landscape sized fuel treatments south of Wells off U.S. Highway 93 help solve vegetation, fire, and grazing issues.*

# FIRE

- ▶ The fire seasons of 1999, 2000, and 2001 saw nearly 1.2 million acres burn on public lands in northeastern Nevada—and taxed fire-fighting resources just about to the limit.
- ▶ Since 2001, less than 5,000 acres have burned in the Elko Field Office area, giving BLM and other fire fighting agencies the opportunity to regroup, re-equip, and plan for the future.

## ► Fire Management Planning

**B**LM Elko Field Office is in the process of implementing a Land Use Plan Amendment for Fire Management. In June 2004, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Nevada Division of Forestry met with BLM to discuss implementing BLM's new direction for fire management and budgeting. The goal is to develop an interagency fire management plan which will increase fire suppression and budget efficiency among all agencies. In addition, through this planning effort, the plan addresses each agency's fire management strategies and constraints based on resource objectives. The resource objectives have been developed by BLM resource specialists and where appropriate, in coordination with Nevada Department of Wildlife biologists.

Part of the new direction includes changes in fire-fighting strategy and tactics. The safety of the fire fighters and the public is a very critical factor. Fire-fighting tactics that were effective years ago may not be effective now. The land use plan amendment addresses this by defining specific parameters for suppression related to timing, acreage, and constraints if any (such as habitat for Lahontan Cutthroat Trout).

**Below left:** *The Tatra Wildland Ultra XT fire engine was tested in the Elko BLM fire program for 2 years. "There's no other fire engine like it in the nation," said BLM Elko Fire Management Officer Joe Freeland in describing the prototype of the next generation of wildland fire engines. "It's unique." Based on technology developed for the military in the Czech Republic, the "Wildland Ultra XT" experimental fire engine was field tested by the BLM Elko Field Office's Wells, Nevada, Fire Station.*

**Below right:** *The Ruby Mountain Hotshot Crew lines up for a group photo during the 2003 fire season. The Ruby Mountain Hotshots were formed in Elko in 2001 as part of the National Fire Plan that resulted from the extensive 2000 fire season when over 8.4 million acres burned nationally. BLM's Ruby Mountain Hotshot Crew based in Elko, Nevada, received full certification in 2003 as a nationally recognized fire-fighting resource.*





# STEWARDSHIP & COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

The Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group, Inc. is beginning its second five years of collaborative stewardship work. The Group was organized by several Elko County citizens who attended a BLM-sponsored training called Community Based Partnerships and Ecosystems for a Healthy Environment. The Stewardship Group uses collaborative partnership concepts to encourage science-based public land management and conflict resolution.

In addition to offering monthly programs and special workshops to its membership, there are several noteworthy items which reflect the Group's continued efforts and successes. The Stewardship Group's Board has been formally evaluating the Group's efforts over the past five years. Working with the University of Michigan, the Board has been using a comprehensive evaluation process to identify the Group's successes and to chart the direction for the next five years.

The Stewardship Group's Sage Grouse Pod (committee) completed the Elko County Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Strategy. In 2004, the Elko Strategy became part of the Nevada Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy, which was formulated to address the proposed listing of sage grouse as a threatened or endangered species.

Another major accomplishment resulted from the Group's November 2003, workshop "Mining and the Community, A Partnership." A new collaborative group – the Northern Nevada Partnership – Elko formed as a result of that workshop. The NNP-E is concentrating on emphasizing economic sustainability for communities that base much of their current economic existence on mining.

The Elko Field Office has been actively involved in the efforts of the Group, including providing speakers for monthly meetings, providing logistical support for the Group, and relying on the Group for review and comment on BLM activities such as the preparation of amendments of Elko's land use plans for fire management and wild horses, and recreation use on public lands.

The Stewardship Group continues to be highly successful in eliminating misinformation, providing comfortable forums for the public to meet and associate with agency staff, providing meaningful public involvement opportunities, reducing conflict and contention, and building a supportive constituency for public land management.



**Above:** Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group members restore riparian habitat as part of a bio-engineering workshop.



**At left:** Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group Vice President Agee Smith (left) and President Leta Collord accept the national 4 C's award from BLM Director Kathleen Clarke in October 2004.

# RANGE/GRAZING MANAGEMENT

BLM continues to work with grazing permittees to meet Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health.

- 49% of the Standards and Guidelines (S&G) assessments and determinations have been completed on the public acres in the Elko Field Office area since 1997 when the S&Gs were approved by the Secretary. (Completed 3,434,569 acres out of a total of 7,048,831 acres)
- BLM is focusing on completing the Marys River Complex, Cottonwood, and Hubbard/Vineyard assessments/evaluations. When these are completed, it will add an additional 365,435 acres (5%) to our accomplishments.
- The remaining high-priority assessments/evaluations are scheduled to be completed by 2008.



**Above:** *Members of the Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council, Newmont Mining Corporation, Maggie Creek Ranches, and BLM staff examine riparian changes resulting from intense grazing management on Maggie Creek.*

**Right:** *Long shadows mean a long day in the field for members of the South Buckhorn Allotment Working Group.*

Allotment evaluations have been completed and multiple use decisions/agreements have been issued on 75% of the public acres in the Elko Field Office area since the mid-1980s. This includes the acreage noted above associated with the S&G assessments. (covers 5,281,068 acres). This will increase to 80% when the Marys River, Cottonwood, and Hubbard Vineyard evaluations are completed.

During the Marys River Allotment Complex evaluation, many issues dealt with riparian impacts. To help address those issues, the Elko Field Office hosted a Proper Functioning Condition (PFC)/Riparian Grazing Management Workshop conducted by the Nevada PFC Cadre and the National Riparian Service Team. The field locations were within the Marys River Basin, on the Stormy Allotment and associated private lands. The workshop was held the last full week of May 2004. Several permittees within the Marys River Complex were present. This workshop combined the standard training for PFC with monitoring and grazing management techniques that are conducive to maintaining and/or improving riparian conditions.

The Elko Field Office continues to manage grazing permits for 235 allotments and 181 livestock operators.

Rangeland monitoring will continue so that scheduled allotment evaluations will be completed. Emphasis continues on completing allotment evaluations and issuing multiple use decisions to address changes needed for meeting Rangeland Health standards.





**H**ighlights of the BLM Elko Field Office wildlife program include continued strengths of partnerships and grants. Eight wildlife habitat enhancement projects were made possible in 2004 through existing and newly developed partnerships. In 2004, two wildlife guzzlers were built by the BLM fire crew and volunteers in the Spruce Mountain and Pequop Mountains areas southeast of Wells, Nevada.

## Sage grouse

Concern about the potential listing of sage grouse as a Threatened or Endangered Species is an important issue in the entire west. The Northeastern Nevada and Central Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Plans were sent to the Governor's committee for inclusion in the statewide plan which was presented to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for consideration.

In response to petitions to list the greater sage grouse as threatened or endangered, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a 90-day finding in April, 2004 which determined that the petitions and other available information provide substantial biological information that indicate further review of the status of the species is warranted. The subsequent nine-month review process included a more thorough review of all available information and a request for input from State and Federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the greater sage grouse and its sagebrush habitat. Following this full status review, the Service made the determination not to list the species as either threatened or endangered. BLM nationwide provided a sage grouse conservation package for consideration during the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's nine-month review.



**Left:** *Wildlife guzzler tank was airlifted into a remote area south of Wells, Nevada. BLM Fire Crew hiked into the location and installed the guzzler in one day.*

**Below left:** *Young sage grouse hen is fitted with a satellite tracking collar as part of a study to track sage grouse movement in northern Elko County.*

**Below right:** *Volunteers build a wildlife guzzler in eastern Elko County.*



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EDUCATION

*Right: First graders at Spring Creek Elementary watch sheep dogs at work. BLM range technician Kristine Dedolph gives demonstrations to area schools every year.*



*Right: BLM Elko geologist Frank Bergwall explains how mining and reclamation operations work to second graders at Carlin Elementary School.*



*Elko County students  
and Nevada Civil Air  
Patrol offices all across  
Nevada are using upgraded  
computer equipment courtesy  
of the Bureau of Land  
Management.*

*Right: BLM Elko Property Manager Marie Smith (left) donates excess BLM computers to the Elko County School District.*



*Right: California Trail Center Acting Manager Dave Jamiel tells trails stories in the Elko City Park behind the Museum.*



Taking BLM to the classroom and the community-at-large is an important part of what we do. Each year, teachers invite Elko Field Office employees to area schools to teach students about their environment and natural resources. BLM employees participate in Career Fairs for the Spring Creek Middle School, Owyhee Schools, Elko County High Schools and Great Basin College. Every year in May, BLMers give presentations at the Lamoille Canyon Environmental Education Week.

Along with the Northeastern Nevada Museum and Nevada Humanities Council, the Elko Field Office sponsors the *History in the Park—Stories from the West*, a free lecture series reflecting the wealth of history of Nevada and the American West.

Employees are active in community events such as the Mining Expo, Balloon Festival, Elko County Fair and many others.

Elko County students and Nevada Civil Air Patrol offices all across Nevada are using upgraded computer equipment courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management. In early 2004, the BLM Elko Field Office donated 37 computers to the Elko County School District and 15 computers to the Civil Air Patrol of Nevada.



# VOLUNTEERS

**B**LM's involvement in the community is very much a two-way street. Elko County citizens have a long tradition of volunteering their time to benefit public lands. Each year, volunteers donate literally thousands of hours helping with many tasks such as planting trees, building wildlife guzzlers, counting sage grouse, installing markers and signs on the California National Historic Trail, picking up trash, and much more.

The Hawkwatch International Goshute Raptor Project continues to be a major volunteer effort. A project Educator with Hawkwatch also does Wilderness Study Area surveillance work, recreation work assisting visitors with Leave No Trace camping and hiking information, and providing environmental education and interpretation.

In 2003 and 2004, 25,000+ volunteer hours completed work and projects valued at more than \$400,000 for the BLM Elko Field Office.

A highlight of every year's volunteer program is National Public Lands Day. In May 2004, 42 volunteers planted 60 cottonwood trees along the South Fork of the Humboldt River about 12 miles south of Elko in celebration of National Public Lands Day.



**Above:** *Volunteers plant cottonwood trees on the bank of the South Fork of the Humboldt*

**Below left:** *Back Country Horsemen pack trees across the South Fork of the Humboldt*



*In 2003 and 2004, 25,000+ volunteer hours completed work and projects valued at more than \$400,000 for the BLM Elko Field Office.*

**Below:** *Local youth and future fire fighters get to try on the clothes and hold the tools during the Elko County Fair.*



# RESTORING THE LAND

## Great Basin Restoration Initiative

The BLM Elko Field Office continues to work on the Great Basin Restoration Initiative (GBRI) – a long-term interagency strategy to restore the ecological health of the Great Basin. Its goal is to work together to achieve an improved rangeland health through a collaborative vision with state, federal and local government agencies, along with the tribes, ranchers, miners, environmental advocates and others who have a stake in the long-term health of the Great Basin. All field offices in Nevada are implementing sustainable projects as part of GBRI.

For Fiscal Years 2002-2007, the Elko Field Office is taking a landscape approach to GBRI project planning and implementation. The Field Office has been divided into eight landscape areas. In each landscape area, projects will be prioritized by the following resource issues: Sage Grouse and Sagebrush Obligate Species Habitat Protection, Sage Grouse Habitat and Sagebrush Obligate Species Improvement, Crucial Big Game Winter Range, Lahontan Cutthroat Trout/Spotted Frog Habitat, Impaired Watersheds, Wild Horse Herd Management Areas, Final Multiple Use Decision Implementation, Invasive/ Non-Native Species, and Forest Health.

**Below:** *Seeding operations continue in the winter to take advantage of moisture conditions.*



In the Elko Field Office, many GBRI program goals and related projects overlap and are closely tied to implementation of multiple use decisions, fire rehabilitation, and fuels reduction projects. During the 1999, 2000, and 2001 fire seasons almost 3 million acres burned in Nevada and over 1.5 million acres of those lands are in areas managed by the BLM Elko Field Office.

BLM cannot accomplish this work without partners, which include ranchers, county governments, Nevada Division of Wildlife, Nevada Division of Forestry, and others.

The following accomplishments include fire rehabilitation projects from 1999 to 2003, hazardous fuels reduction projects, 8100 range improvement projects, and weed control projects:

- ▶ 3,400+ acres treated by prescribed fire
- ▶ 401,390 acres treated by aerial, drill, dribble and hand seeding
- ▶ 473 miles of new, reconstructed or repaired fence
- ▶ 1,425 miles of dozer line rehabilitated, re-contoured, and re-seeded
- ▶ 465 miles of road repaired
- ▶ 740 acres spike treatment (chemical sagebrush thinning)
- ▶ 17,200 acres of mechanical treatment; i.e. brush beating, roller chopping (sagebrush and juniper), and discing cheatgrass

## Watershed protections:

- ▶ 2,200 straw bales used to create sediment "traps" in drainages
- ▶ 45,000 linear feet straw wattles (long straw "tubes" placed on slopes for erosion control)
- ▶ 450,000 square feet of erosion blankets (to slow soil movement during recovery)
- ▶ 4,100 acres treated for noxious weeds
- ▶ 81,000 acres monitored for noxious weeds



**N**ortheastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Chairman Vince Garcia commented, "While there are many ecological concerns in northeastern Nevada, our RAC feels that noxious weeds is the most significant issue facing public land managers and private land owners. Noxious weeds do not recognize boundaries. It was pointed out to our Council that in Montana, there are currently more acres infested by weeds than there are public land acres in Nevada."

This concern with the proliferation of species and the rate of spread of noxious weeds in northeastern Nevada led the RAC to take action. Seventy people representing 20 agencies, political entities, and groups met in February 2003, in Elko at a public workshop sponsored by the RAC. The workshop was facilitated by University of Nevada, Reno Cooperative Extension Agent Kent McAdoo.

In 2004, the BLM Elko Field Office worked with Diamond Valley Weed District, Jiggs Conservation District, Owyhee Conservation District, and the Spring Creek Region Cooperative Weed Management Area for weed treatment.

The Elko Cooperative Weed Management Area was incorporated with the State in February 2004. Working cooperatively, BLM is compiling inventory data for the entire county and doing project planning – such as developing map inventory standards and conducting a weed control project at the South Fork State Park. Elko County is very supportive of the weed suppression efforts.

In 2004, BLM Elko Field Office spent about \$325,000 from several sources and partnerships. The goal is to treat 4,200 acres this year and to inventory an additional 750,000 acres in Elko County



**Above:** *BLM weed treatment specialist Robert Johnson treats Scotch thistle on an area burned by the Buckhorn Fire in 2001.*

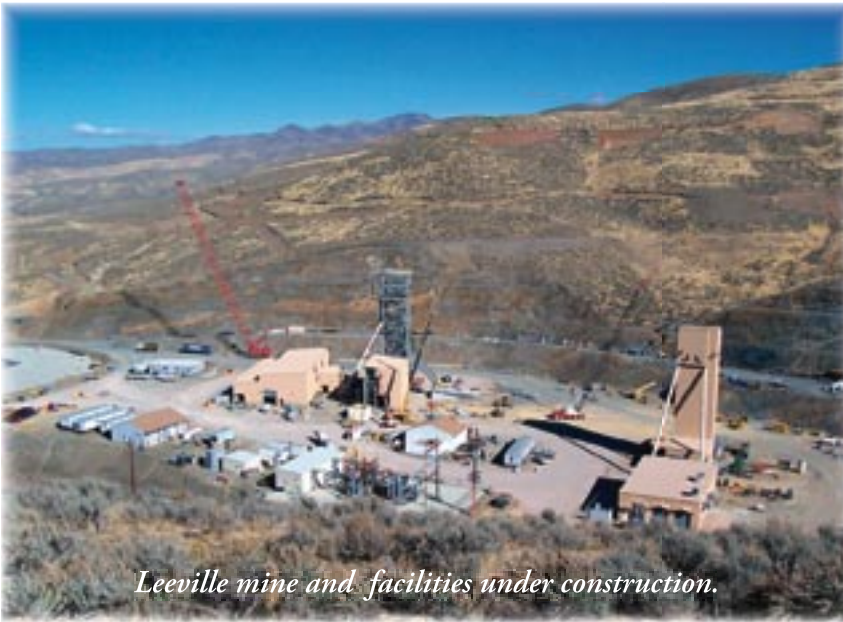
**Below Left:** *Almost monoculture infestation of Scotch thistle 5 miles north of Carlin, NV covering nearly 1,500 acres. Area of Scotch Thistle before treatment.*

**Below Right:** *This photo (same area as the 'before' photo) was taken after 3 seasons of treatment. The thistle have been almost completely wiped out.*



# MINING

- Exploration, mining, and reclamation activities continue in the BLM Elko Field Office area. Increases in the price of gold have translated to increased interest in exploration.
- Over half of the nation's gold production occurs in the Elko Field Office area. In 2003, 4.8 million ounces of gold were produced.



*Leeville mine and facilities under construction.*

*The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Emigrant Mine is scheduled for completion in late 2005.*

## Emigrant Mine Project

An Environmental Impact Statement is being written to analyze the proposed Plan of Operations for the Newmont Mining Corporation's proposed Emigrant Project in Elko County, Nevada.

The proposed Emigrant Mine would be located about ten miles south of Carlin, Nevada, and would include developing and operating an open pit mine; constructing a waste rock disposal facility, storing oxide waste in mined out areas of the pit; developing an oxide heap leach pad; constructing ancillary facilities; temporarily rerouting intermittent stream and flows in the pit area; and concurrent reclamation. Proposed mining operations would last for approximately 9 years through the year 2013. About 1,172 acres of public land and 260 acres of private land would be disturbed.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Emigrant Mine is scheduled for completion in late 2005.



## Before and After Reclamation

**Above, top:** Kinsley Mine Site before reclamation.

**Above, bottom:** Kinsley Mine Site after reclamation.



# LANDS ACTIONS

## Land Sales

**F**ive parcels comprising 648 acres of BLM-administered public lands in Elko and Lander Counties were offered for sale in 2004 under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act of 2000 (also called the 'Baca Bill'). The parcels ranged in size from 40 acres to 250 acres. Two of the parcels totaling 290 acres were sold and the remaining three parcels were offered at the Las Vegas land auction in February 2005.

- Disposal of lands through sale is a way to reduce the amount of checkerboard land ownership and more importantly, to make federal lands available for private ownership in Elko, Eureka and Lander counties which have large amounts of public lands.

## Proposed Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act Acquisitions

In Round 4 the BLM Elko Field Office had three parcels approved for acquisition — Clover Valley, IL Ranch, and Rock Creek. The IL Ranch is not completely funded at this point (\$20 million approved thus far). BLM will begin acquisition process for the parcels.

No parcels were nominated for Elko County in Round 5.

An illegal dumping site on public land in Elko County was cleaned up. Located about five miles north of Wells, Nevada, the site began as a materials storage area in the late 1960s for paving U.S. Highway 93. Over the years, the 1.3-acre site turned into an illegal dump.

Elko contractor Legarza Exploration worked for a week hauling 47 10-ton truck loads of refuse to the Elko landfill and cleaning up the site. BLM Geologist/Hazardous Materials Coordinator Deb McFarlane worked for several months to get the project funded and completed.



## Before & After Cleanup

**Above, top:** *Dumpsite north of Wells, Nevada, before cleanup*

**Above, bottom:** *Dumpsite north of Wells, Nevada, after cleanup*

# CALIFORNIA TRAIL CENTER & CULTURAL RESOURCES



- ▶ The City of Elko, Elko County and the State of Nevada, with the support of the BLM Nevada Elko Field Office, have proposed a California National Historic Trail Interpretive Center near Elko, Nevada. The proposal calls for BLM to construct, maintain, and staff the facility. The City of Elko, Elko County, and the State of Nevada together have committed a total of \$6 million towards the project.
- ▶ The Elko Trail Center will be unique. The California Trail experience is a rich part of American history. While interpreted to some extent at other facilities, no single interpretive center exists that deals solely with the California Trail. The Center is scheduled to open in early 2007.

## Cultural Resources

Humans have used and occupied the public lands in Elko County for more than 10,000 years. In all that time the land has changed. Human use has played a significant part in changing the land more than we might realize.

Long-abandoned archaeological sites and historic landscapes give us important insights into the ways human activities and the environment have linked together through time, how seemingly minor cultural practices can contribute to substantial environmental change.



**Above left:** *Great Basin Community College in Elko and the BLM Elko Field Office sponsor an annual summer field school.*

**Left:** *University of Nevada, Reno and BLM Elko Field Office have partnered for several years to conduct an annual summer field school for UNR students.*

**Right:** *Members of the Humboldt Highroaders have spent years installing trail markers and signs on the California National Historic Trail and Hastings Cutoff in Elko County.*





# RECREATION & WILDERNESS

**B**LM Elko Field Office is working with a partnership to develop off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails in Elko County. The partnership includes the Elko Convention and Visitors Authority, U.S. Forest Service, and interested citizens. This grassroots effort started as an economic diversity project and thus far has generated more than \$250,000 in grants.

The basic premise is that the network of open roads and trails on public lands in northeastern Nevada serves as the attraction for thousands of recreation enthusiasts in the West.

In 2004, the Elko Field Office processed six competitive Special Recreation Permits for a variety of activities – from an OHV rock crawling event to motorcycle and dune buggy racing. We also administer about 30 commercial Special Recreation Permits, primarily for outfitters and guides conducting a variety of activities on public lands.

## Wilderness

Wilderness Study Areas are designated by a Federal land-management agency (the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, National Park Service, or the Fish and Wildlife Service) as having wilderness characteristics, thus making it worthy of consideration by Congress for wilderness designation. While Congress considers whether to designate a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) as permanent wilderness, the Federal agency manages the WSA so as not to impair the area's suitability for wilderness designation.

The Elko Field Office continues to manage 10 Wilderness Study Areas with a total of 272,400 acres, to preserve their wilderness characteristics. Management includes:

- ▶ Monthly surveillance to monitor for impairment of wilderness character, such as new surface disturbance, woodcutting, or temporary structures.
- ▶ Restoration projects for violations within WSAs, including off-highway vehicle route rehabilitation.
- ▶ Working closely with HawkWatch International to continue the raptor monitoring project in the Goshute Peak WSA.
- ▶ Review all project proposals that are proposed in or near WSAs to ensure that wilderness values are not compromised.



*Above: A new fully accessible fishing platform at Wilson Reservoir improves fishing opportunities.*



*Left: A new bridge over Susie Creek improves recreation access.*



*Above: An Educator at the HawkWatch site (Goshute Peak WSA) describes what they study after trapping a bird.*

# WILD HORSES

The Elko Resource Management Plan, as it was approved in 1987, recognizes four areas used as habitat by wild horses. These herd areas were identified as locations inhabited by wild horses at the time of the passing of the Free-Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act (1971). The four herd areas were Little Humboldt, Rock Creek, Owyhee, and Diamond Hills North.

In October 2003, the BLM Elko Field Office released the Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment and Decision Record. The purpose of the Amendment was to update the direction for the management of wild horses within the western portion of the Elko Field Office.

The Amendment designated wild horse "herd management areas" (HMAs) within the existing Little Humboldt, Rock Creek, Owyhee, and Diamond Hills North herd areas. The Amendment also reduced conflicts with protected sensitive fish species, wildlife and livestock while ensuring the areas can sustain viable populations of wild horses.

The Amendment also updated the desired herd size that could be managed within each HMA while still preserving and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship. This desired herd size will be used as a starting point for determining the appropriate number of wild horses for each HMA. The appropriate management levels are established through multiple use decisions and based on monitoring data.

Funding for the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program was a big issue in 2004. BLM did receive an additional \$7.665 million for the Wild Horse and Burro Program in late 2004.

Elko Field Office gathered wild horses within three HMAs in 2004—the Diamond Hills North, and the Rock Creek and Little Humboldt HMAs (Rock-Humboldt Complex).

The Diamond Hills North HMA was gathered as part of the Diamond Complex which included the Diamond HMA from the Battle Mountain Field Office and the Diamond Hills South HMA from the Ely Field Office.

There were 106 wild horses gathered by a contractor in the Diamond Hills North HMA. Also gathered were 1,498 wild horses in the Rock Creek and Little Humboldt HMAs.

**Above:** *A contract helicopter herds wild horses into the gather trap*

**Right:** *Wild horses running in the Little Humboldt Herd Management Area.*

